

PUBLIC

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Medical concern / Torture / Detention without charge

18 June 2004

ETHIOPIA

Imiru Gurmessa Birru (m), aged in his 50s

Imiru Gurmessa Birru is seriously ill in police custody at the Police Hospital in the capital Addis Ababa. The former employee of the Ministry of Coffee and Tea Development is said to be extremely ill and unable to move. Following his arrest in mid March, he was reportedly tortured and denied medication for diabetes which has led to liver problems.

He was admitted to the Police Hospital around 11 June and though he has received medical treatment, this appears to be inadequate for his critical condition. His family have also been denied access to him although they were previously allowed to visit him in police custody. Imiru Gurmessa Birru was arrested in mid March and allegedly beaten at the central police investigation unit (known as *Maikelawi*). He was also reportedly refused medication for his diabetes and severe health problems.

The specific grounds for his arrest are not known and he has not been formally charged. He has appeared in court five times, but each court hearing has been adjourned in order to allow the police more time to present evidence. Though his health was obviously deteriorating on each occasion, the judges hearing his case reportedly paid no attention to signs of ill-treatment and took no steps ensure that he was given adequate medical treatment.

At the time of his arrest, Imiru Gurmessa Birru was living in Addis Ababa with his daughter and other relatives. He was an active member of the Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane Yesus Church, which is part of the Lutheran World Federation. He was previously detained without charge in 2000 for eight months on political grounds. He is a member of the Oromo "nationality" (ethnic group) and was accused of supporting the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), though he denied the accusation. He was reportedly tortured during his detention and has suffered from poor health ever since. Prior to this in 1978 he was detained and tortured under the former Dergue government.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern that Imiru Gurmessa Birru is extremely ill at the Police Hospital in Addis Ababa;
- appealing for him to be given all necessary medical treatment in hospital, and full access to his family;
- calling for an independent investigation into the allegations of torture and denial of medical treatment in the central police investigation unit (*Maikelawi*);
- expressing concern at reports that the judges hearing his case paid no attention to allegations of ill-treatment and clear signs of serious illness, and that they took no action to investigate his treatment or ensure that he was given urgently needed medical treatment;
- calling for Imiru Gurmessa Birru to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence or released immediately.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice

Mr Harke Haroye

P O Box 1370

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telegram: Justice Minister, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 1 517775

Salutation: Dear Minister

Federal Police Commissioner

Mr Workneh Gebeyehu

Ministry of Federal Affairs

P O Box 1031

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telegrams: Federal Police Commissioner, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 1 552020

Salutation: Dear Commissioner

COPIES TO:

Minister of Health

Dr Kebede Tadesse

P O Box 1234

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 1 519366

Salutation: Dear Minister

and to diplomatic representatives of Ethiopia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 July 2004.